

Dwelling Portably

May 1994

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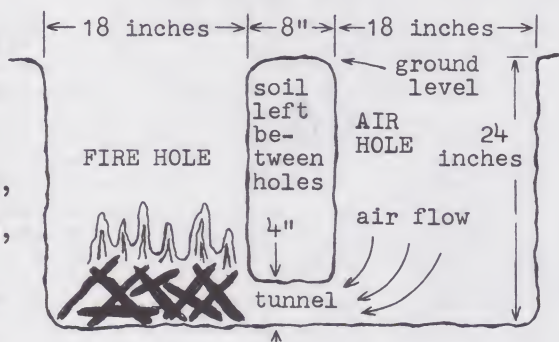
The Dakota hole.

This burns hotter and is more easily regulated than an open fire, due to the air shaft which feeds air from the bottom. If dry hardwood is burned, there is little smoke; and, being underground, the fire is less visible at night.

Dig two holes 18" diameter by 24" deep, leaving 8" of dirt between them. Then burrow a 4" diameter tunnel between them.

Build your fire in the bottom of one hole. Regulate the air flow by partly covering otherhole. CAUTION: this fire can burn hot enough to ruin a pot. Tim Leathers, TN, May & Dec.

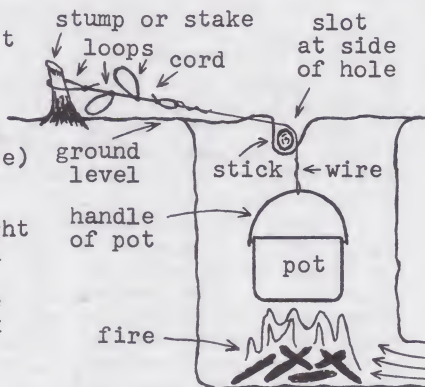
(Comment:) This seems much better than an open fire, yet is simple and without the problems of a wood stove (which is nasty to carry and, if thin metal, soon rusts through). B & H



Some ways to suspend a pot.

Setting a pot on rocks isn't too satisfactory. The pot can slide off and spill, its height can't be changed easily, and refueling the fire under the pot (which is where you want the fire) will be difficult if the pot is in a hole.

With the Dakota hole, I might make slots in the ground on each side of the hole, then place a stick across the hole and in the slots. The slots keep the stick in place. The stick should be stout enough not to burn if the fire momentarily blazes high



(and preferably damp or green) and clean of dirt or loose bark (which could fall into the pot if the cover is removed).

I would suspend the pot with wire that goes over the stick and attaches to a cord. I tie several loops in the cord. One loop goes over a small stump, a low stub-branch, or a stake. I change the pot's height by placing a different loop over.

Or, I would rig 3 cords to form a Y (if seen from above), tying them out to trees. The cords join in a ring above the pot. The wire/cord from the pot goes up thru the ring and then outward, and one of several loops hooks over a stub branch. This allows pot to be raised completely out of hole.

For suspending a pot above an open fire, Julie Summers suggested (in June '84 MP) a tripod and hanger stick, which allows the pot to be moved sideways (by moving the tripod) as well as up or down (by placing a different crotch over the joint of the tripod - see pic on next page). However, with some solar cookers and maybe with the Dakota hole, the tripod would be in the way unless very large.

With any system, rig the pot before lighting the fire. Bert & Holly Davis, Oregon, April

Some alternatives to campfires.

In the media, an open fire is supposed to indicate outdoor know-how. But in reality, an open fire may indicate a LACK of know-how. An open fire wastes time, wastes fuel, produces smoke, and may be dangerous. Smoke is bad to breathe - and alarming. Even smoke from a safe woodstove can invite hassles, because it can't be distinguished from a beginning forest fire.

We usually live in well-insulated shelters or mild weather. Only once during the past ten years did we need a fire for warming ourselves.

Therefore this article will concern cooking. Alternatives:

Don't cook. While light camping during summer, we often go for days, sometimes weeks without cooking. Instead we eat: raw berries we forage; dry foods we cooked previously, such as popcorn, biscuits/crackers/hardtack, pinole; ready-to-eat foods such as bread or tortillas we buy if camped near cities.

Use barbeque pit in a park. An option when in a city.

Solar cook. Though not possible year-around here, we now often do so in summer - the very time when fires are most risky and alarming. Some proven solar-cookers are cheap and fairly simple to build, and semi portable - light but bulky. (We will soon test another that is very portable.)

Cook on a portable propane stove. We now do so when at a base camp - about 8 months a year. By using insulative cooking techniques (see Sept'84 MP p.5; now part of Feb'85m) we burn less than two 5-gallon tanks per year. Refills cost us \$6-\$7½ per tank. Be sure to get a stove and fittings that connect to 5-gal tanks (not the little canisters). Some people favor kerosene or gasoline stoves. But propane seems less smelly and may be safer. Principal disadvantage: propane tanks are heavier. But we use too little to fret.

Cook with charcoal. We would if we lived too remote for backpacking propane. We may anyway some day. Charcoal can be made, we've read, by heating wood in a closed but vented container. (By condensing the fumes, wood alcohol and other chemicals can be collected.) We would make charcoal in quantity during the wet season (when no fire hazard) at a site away from our base camp (so no odors there) and near plentiful down wood which we would gather in advance during the dry season and tarp. IMPORTANT: have adequate ventilation with ANY combustion, especially with charcoal because its fumes are odorless (we've heard).

Make a lightweight woodstove out of a 3-or-5-gal metal can (see Jim Burnap's design in Sept'84 MP p.1; now part of June'84m). Or buy a portable stove. Or form a stove or equivalent (eg, Dakota hole) out of earth. Compared to an open fire, a stove is easier to ignite, needs less tending, burns hotter, can burn damper wood, produces less smoke, uses less wood, and is safer. The smoke outlet should include a metal screen to stop sparks.

If necessary to build an open fire when the woods are dryish, the safest place is probably close by a creek in the bottom of a narrow canyon, where the ground is wet and the air calm. Clear surface debris from several yards, pre-soak the soil, dig a pit for the fire, and keep the fire small. The safest time is usually just before dawn when things are cool and damp from dew. Afterwards drench whole area. B & H



A wild salad green that is widely available.

The new leaves of gosmore (*Hypochoeris radicata*) are a welcome treat during winter and early spring when few fresh foods are available. Gosmore is also called "Chinese lettuce", and is related to lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*). When young, gosmore leaves taste to us much like some cultivated loose-leaf lettuces: bland or slightly bitter (but not unpleasantly), depending on the individual plant or the growing conditions. Later, gosmore plants that get much sun become quite bitter, while plants in the shade may remain palatable through summer.

Unlike many wild greens which taste acceptable at first, but after a few minutes grazing become unpleasant or irritating, gosmore continues to please us. Some days we eat several dozen leaves (each $\pm \frac{1}{2}$ by 2 inches), picking just one leaf from each plant, and eating immediately, after wiping or washing off any rain-splattered soil. (Haven't tried cooking.)

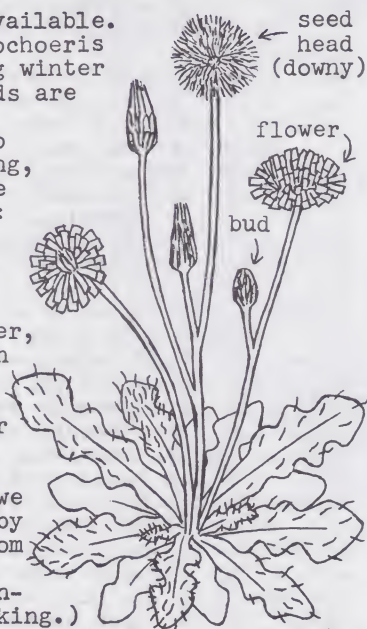
Gosmore is also called "false dandelion", and is related to dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*). Like a dandelion, gosmore starts as a rosette (flat, circular cluster) close to the ground of pinnately-lobed-or-toothed leaves with milky juice that are basal only (none on the flower stalk); then produces yellow blossoms which mature into downy seeds spread by wind. But gosmore leaves may be hairier ("cats-ear" is yet another name) and the flower stalks are tougher, often branched, and can grow taller (up to 2 feet).

One more look-alike relative of gosmore is hawkbit (*Leontodon nudicaulis*). It often grows with gosmore and we may have foraged them together without distinguishing them.

All the plants mentioned above, and several others with dandelion-like leaves, belong to the chicory tribe (a botanical subdivision of the daisy family (*compositae*)). I know of no members that are poisonous. However, at least one more-distant relative is: tansy ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*) which also bears yellow daisy-like flowers. But compared to gosmore, dandelion and hawkbit; ragwort's leaves are more divided and raggedy, and some leaves are on the flower stalks which often grow taller (to 4') and more branched.

Plants can be most easily identified while blooming. Patches could be marked then for harvesting later. With an unfamiliar GREEN plant, sample just a tiny piece at first, chew and spit out. If irritating to mouth, reject. If not irritating, wait a few hours before trying more. (Don't do this with mushrooms. Some deadly mushrooms taste fine.)

Gosmore "is especially abundant west of the Cascade Range, from Canada to California; perhaps the most conspicuous pasture and roadside weed during summer" writes Ronald Taylor in Northwest Weeds. Fortunately for us, gosmore is also common on some forested hills in open/semi-open spots, especially on north slopes where the ground was disturbed by logging. Several species also grow in the east, and in Europe to which it is native. Gosmore is perennial, but some species are annual. Holly, Oregon May 1994



We eat raw greens AS WE PICK.

We don't collect them to later make a salad, because, unlike some cultivated salad plants such as head lettuce and head cabbage which were bred partly for keeping qualities, most wild greens start wilting as soon as they are picked and produce toxins not found in the fresh plants.

Also, eating one leaf at a time, we immediately taste any unpleasant and possibly poisonous look-alike, which we might not notice if mixed up in a salad.

Very few mammals collect greens to eat later. One that does is the sewella (*Aplodontia rufa*), a rodent that actually makes hay. But apes and monkeys graze as they go, we've read.

H & B

Foraging wild edibles saves us much money and time.

We are not purists. When one of us gets to a store (not often), if (eg) cabbage is on sale at 19¢ a pound, we usually buy some - provided we don't have to carry it far before eating it (it's mostly water). But when cabbage is 69¢ a pound and other vegies even higher, or when we are far from stores, we eat only wild greens.

"But you can't survive on just greens - you aren't cows" we hear. "What do you eat instead of potatoes?"

We eat rice, popcorn, wheat, corn, oatmeal, flour - all of which we buy. But, if bought in bulk, grains are cheap; and being dry, are light and keep well. Fruits, vegetables and meat are what are expensive to buy and troublesome to keep. So foraging those foods can pay off big. Holly & Bert

Rotting vegetation produces some heat.

Under tent floors or stacked alongside mini-shelters, straw or similar 'rotttables' can be more effective than is passive insulation. That is a little-known secret for keeping pipes and water containers unfrozen during cold weather. A few inches of compressed straw above and below the water line will provide just enough heat to do the trick.

If I needed a cheap warm shelter, I'd build a tiny straw or hay-bale shack. Better than a tent any winter day. Al Fry,

ID, Feb.

Considerations when choosing insulative materials.

In farming areas, hay sometimes gets damp and moldy (not good as animal feed) and can be purchased cheaply. In some cities during fall, huge quantities of leaves can be easily collected from lawns and sidewalks, etc. (Property owners even pay for removal.) But in most woods, leaves are difficult to gather in quantity. Where most trees are conifers, leaves are scarce. But even where plentiful, fallen leaves may be intermixed with bushes, vines and fallen branches.

So, if a material is heavy or bulky, I would use it only if it is easily obtained AND CLOSE to a good camp-site. (Hay bales or leaves are no bargain if you need a pickup to haul them to the mountains, or a rented site to camp near them.)

If leaves ARE abundant and close, I might build a sturdy framework out of interwoven branches, cover that with something to keep fine particles from sifting in (old drapes, often discarded, may be good; plastic is fair but will puncture), pile the leaves over and around (at least a foot thick, preferably thicker - they will compact), and lean more branches to hold the leaves in place. (I haven't done this much.) If rain or snow-melt is likely, suspend a tarp a few inches above (so that moisture in the leaves can escape).

If I plan to live in it long, I would make one side (the side with least foliage) out of many layers of clear plastic to let in light. Bert & Holly, Oregon

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Gathering What The Great Nature Provided: Food Traditions of The Gitksan.

Gitksan means People of the 'Ksan (Skenna) River, ±135 miles NE of Prince Rupert, a port city in British Columbia ±500 air miles NW of Vancouver, BC. In 1971, some people of 'Ksan (museum and craft village) began to record the elders' knowledge. 90+ people helped with book. (Many informants quoted.)

To get enough food for winter, the people spent summers "working like slaves". (Game was available in winter, but "you can't stay healthy on meat".) "Everyone worked.... No one wanted to be labeled lazy - that was almost as bad as being called a thief." Children had tiny picking boxes; strong adults had ten-gal boxes (water tight; also cooked in by using hot rocks).

Gitksan still eat much "grease", viz, oil, mostly from oolichan, aka candle-fish, served with most dried foods (like butter on bread). To render, the fish are left to decompose, then boiled and the oil skimmed off. "The colour and flavor ... depends on the length of time the fish ripen...."

"The Nass (river) oolichan fishing areas were the Mecca of the Pacific NW." Coast people brought seafood to trade. A Gitksan made the journey with 3 packs, relaying them (going ahead with one, then coming back for another, and so on).

The annual Nass expedition leaves most people little time to garden. But most who stay home do garden, with root crops (eg, potatoes) predominating.

Much fish was eaten fresh, but 20 times more was eaten smoked. Most food stored was first smoked and dried. Fish, meat, and fowl were not eaten raw, except caribou stomach contents, a wintertime source of vitamins.

Berries were mostly dried on a rack, on skunk cabbage leaves, above a fire (to prevent souring), under a rain-shedding roof. Then the berries were rolled up and hung in the rafters to dry further. "I always left quite a few leaves and stems with the berries" to better hold them together. Huckleberries keep quite a while in boxes in a cold place. "There were tons of berries" yearly. Today, most are canned or frozen.

Pantry shelves hung from cords made from alder "which mice do not chew".

Birch bark was "the aluminum foil of our grandfathers." For emergencies, birch-bark-wrapped food was stored in pits ±3' in diameter and 3-4' deep. Food parcels were packed to within 10" of the top, then (eg) dry coniferous needles (which animals don't like to stick their noses in), or burnt bark (which they don't like the smell of) was added. Then earth on top, to disguise the food smell. "The holes were usually opened when frost was still in the ground, and then emptied"

Horsetail reed (*Equisetum hyemale*) was a source of water for hunters. The amount of sweet liquid "increases if the reed is cut and left for a few days."

Cow parsnip (*Heracleum lanatum*) is harvested only when young - never after the first week in July. When eaten fresh, the skin is peeled off. It is eaten raw, boiled, or set close to embers a minute and then peeled. For drying it is split into strips.

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Before flowering, the whole stonecrop plant (*Sedum divergens*) is eaten.

Fiddlehead ferns 2-6" tall were eaten raw, boiled or baked. Not eaten now.

Just before blooming, the stems of fireweed (*Epilobium angustifolium*) contain a sweet syrup. Suck out like pop-thru-a-straw.

Root of bulblet fern (*Cystopteris bulbifera*) like sweet potato. Cooked.

The kernels in the bulbs of chocolate lily (*Fritillaria camschatcensis*) were considered Gitksan wild rice.

Quicker than using an earth oven, is baking in ashes: scoop away some coals, install food (perhaps leaf-wrapped), cover with coals, and leave till done.

1980, 127 pages, U of WA Press, POB 50096, Seattle WA 98145 (price unknown).

All reviews in this issue by Julia Summers, who's also often in Coltsfoot, Living Free, Abapa Freer, and Wild & Weedy (addresses are on pages A,B & C).

People of the Desert and Sea:

Ethnobotany of the Seri Indians.

This monumental work, by Richard S. Felger and Mary B. Moser, documents the old way of life of the Seri Indians, hunter-gatherers of the Gulf of California. Mary, a linguist, has lived with the Seri since 1952. Richard specializes in Sonoran Desert flora and economic botany. Most of the book's information "was common knowledge among the older people." The Seri occupied ±140x15 miles along the eastern shore, plus Tiburón (±20x30) and San Esteban (±4x4) islands. Rainfall 4 to 10 inches per year average. Some summer days 109°+.

"Like most people with very low population density, the Seri had essentially no political organization other than a local, temporary war chief. ... The anarchistic Seri hated authority." Other traits: "gregarious, outgoing, aggressive, independent, nonconforming, pragmatic"; also opportunistic, eg, some Seri raided European livestock; made nails from stolen barbed wire; begged.

Total population, "probably never more than several thousand", dwindled to 200- in the 1930s from foreign diseases and warfare with Spaniards and Mexicans. But in 1982 were 500 and increasing.

Population was limited more by drinking water than food. Each extended family would camp a month or more, then as local food and water were used up, they would relocate. (Heavy items such as metates were stashed.)

Men fetched water, often carrying it 6+ miles, in two pottery vessels in nets at both ends of a stick held over a shoulder. Seri pottery, among the world's largest and thinnest, averaged 3 mm thick - to conserve weight.

Some species of barrel cactus were used for emergency liquid, but sometimes caused diarrhea or bone aches.

Century plant (*Agave* species) also yields emergency fluid, and is eaten as a sweet vegetable. It is dangerously caustic unless well cooked. It was pit roasted 12 or more hours.

Non-alcoholic drinks were made from mesquite pods, jumping cholla gum, and saltwort (*Batis*) roots; alcoholic drinks from cacti fruit, mesquite pods, agave.

Seri liked lots of meat with each meal: clams, oysters, fish, sea turtle, page 5

desert tortoise, chuckwalla, iguana, rattlesnake, birds, grasshoppers, deer, big-horn sheep, jackrabbits, & sea lion. Fat was relished and carefully conserved.

Insect larvae common on wolfberries are ignored, and eaten with the berries.

Seeds of goosefoot (*Chenopodium murale*, which pop like popcorn), and especially seeds of foothill palo verde (*Cercidium microphyllum*) were an important protein source to Seri without sea access, such as in Tiburón's interior.

Unique in all the world, is the Seri use of a marine "grain" - eelgrass (*Zostera marina*): which fruits regardless of droughts. Men and women both harvested it in April, wading chest deep. It was a time of pleasant weather, laughter and happiness. After drying several days, the seeds were threshed with clubs on hide or canvas. Toasted seeds (preferred over raw) were ground and cooked with water as gruel. (Ditto for most other seeds - which was the common practice thruout southwestern North America. Increasing food particle surface reduced cooking time.

Seeds and fruit of 70 species, but vegetative parts of only 26, were eaten. (No non-seed plants were eaten.)

A group of several women and children of an extended family often spent hours, or even a day, walking and gathering. "This was still a common practice in the 1980s" for gathering fruits of jumping cholla (*Opuntia fulgida*), pitaya dulce (aka organ pipe, *Stenocereus thurberi*), pitaya agria (*S. gummosus*), cardon (*Pachycereus pringlei*, largest Sonoran desert cactus), and wolfberry (*Lycium sp.*).

"... when growing on certain legumes (catclaw, ironwood, mesquite)", the ripe (translucent) berries of desert mistletoe (*Phoradendron californicum*) were a Seri staple. But growing on (eg) palo verde or condalia, they were bitter.

Lac, excreted by a scale insect on creosotebush, provided an all-purpose glue and sealant - soft when heated but hardens on cooling. Creosotebush (*Larrea divaricata*) "is one of the most abundant shrubs" in N and S Am. deserts. Still much used for medicine (eg, hot leaves were put on aches).

For vision quests, roots of Vaseyanthus insularis (or *Brandegea bigelovii*) were soaked in water several days, then sipped. Made one "like a drunk person". Psychedelic effects of *Datura* were known but it wasn't used for that. The leaves were used as a poultice on boils; the seeds for tea to numb swollen throat pain.

Seri arrow poison, usually made from sap of Mexican jumping beans (*Sapium*) was greatly feared by enemies. It was also used in hunting. Deer were often found at fruiting organ pipe. Hunters went nude to be without clothing scent.

Early Seri wore little clothing. Face painting or a wreath woven of leafy branches provided sun protection.

Clamshells were used for shovels, bowls, spoons, pottery scrapers, and mirrors (filled with water and set in the shade). Turtle bones were used for digging; and boys slid down bare gravel hillsides in the carapaces.

Generally, there were no special craftspeople. The maker or a family member was the user (except women often exchanged necklaces). May 1994 Page 6

Preferred campsites were in coastal dunes. They provided clean sand, good sea access, breezes, view of approachers.

A brush house, Quonset shaped, was erected by several women in a few hours. A frame of flexible poles (often ocotillo), covered with spineless plants, skins, cloth, and driftwood. When tar paper and then plastic became available, they were sometimes put on before roof.

Each able-bodied Seri man has a balsa (surfboard-like): three bundles of reed grass (*Phragmites*) or giant cane (*Arundo*) lashed together. They were replaced with wooden boats, then fiberglass; enabling the Seri to fish commercially. Outboard fuel costs, in part, brought the Seri into the cash economy. However the Seri native tongue, little changed, remains their first language.

1985, 438 8x10 pp, 282 photos (people, crafts, plants, terrain), \$35 (ppd?) in 1993, U of AZ Press, 1230 N Park Ave. #102, Tucson AZ 85719.

A Taste of the Wild

Edelene Wood, the author, is President of the National Wild Foods Association. Her enthusiasm led to Nature Wonder Weekend, held each September at West Virginia's North Bend State Park.

When Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) is in bloom in the Ohio Valley around early April, "beautiful pink patches in the woods" are visible from airplanes. Buds, blossoms and beans are edible.

When flowering, Ox-eye daisy (*Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*) is unmistakable. At that time learn the leaves' appearance, so you will be able to recognize them alone in winter and early spring, when mild in taste. Edelene loves them.

From Louzian cooks, Edelene learned that sassafras leaves are dried, then ground and sifted super fine for use in File' Gumbo (Sassafras file!).

To defeat worms, Edelene picks acorns (*Quercus* spp.) freshly fallen, then boils in the hull 15 minutes. After hulling: put in boiling water and boil. "As soon as water becomes tea colored", drain and add fresh boiling water. Repeat until "water is clear or for about two hours." Drain; grind; sieve; freeze.

Edelene includes many recipes for incorporating various wild plants and some insects into otherwise ordinary dishes. Once Edelene added to a white cake, 19 boiled, roasted, ground crickets (the consistency of coarse black pepper), labeled it "Cricket Cake", and served at a wild foods gathering. Some guests who enjoyed large helpings didn't believe her.

Edelene's mother made a make-do "one dish meal she called hot berry jam and biscuits. ... Euell Gibbons cooked berries in the same way ... and called it berry flummery: ... cook a pot of berries, take out some of the hot mixture to make a paste with flour or cornstarch, add sugar to taste ..." and mix back into the rest of the berries. Eat hot or cold.

One year Edelene contacted historic places to find out "how their early settlers used wild foods ...", which then became the theme of a banquet.

There is a section on the Outer Banks. 1990, 160 6x9 pages, \$10+\$1 p&h in '92. Allegheny Press, Elgin PA 16413.

Review by Julia Summers.

A Field Guide to Medicinal Plants.

For eastern and central North America, this Peterson Field Guide by Steven Foster and James Duke is excellent, with distinct line drawings of each plant and arrows pointing to identifying features; beautiful color photos of +200 of the +500 plants covered; symbols in margins identifying use in modern medicine, or dangers; index of 460 topics; glossary; and a 27-book bibliography.

Do herbs cause cancer? In the April 17, 1987 Science, comfrey leaf tea ranked "about 17/100 as carcinogenic for its symphytine as a can of beer was for its ethanol... A sassafras root beer, now banned by our FDA, was 1/14 as carcinogenic for its safrole as the can of beer was for its ethanol."

"... studies showing toxic pyrrolizidine alkaloids, especially in the root" of comfrey lessened its popularity.

"Recent studies show that leaves harvested during the blooming period (May-Sept.) are very low in alkaloids."

As sample entries, I've chosen plants I'm familiar with, because they also occur in the west. NB: "This book is not a prescripitor" - usually no dosages.

PEARLY EVERLASTING; *Anaphalis margaritacea* (L.) D.B. Clarke; Composite Family; whole plant (used). Perennial; 1-3 ft. Highly variable. Stem and leaf undersides **COTTONY**. Leaves linear; gray-green above. Flowers in a cluster of globular heads; July-Sept. Heads with several rows of **WHITE**, **DRY**, **PETAL-LIKE** bracts (male flowers have yellow tufts in center). Where found: dry soil, fields. Nfld. to NC; CA to AK. Uses: Expectorant, astringent, anodyne, sedative. Used for diarrhea, dysentery. American Indians used tea for colds, bronchial coughs, and throat infections. Poultice used for rheumatism, burns, sores, bruises, and swellings. Leaves smoked for throat and lung ailments.

HEAL-ALL, **SELF-HEAL**, *Prunella vulgaris* L.; Mint Family; whole plant (used). Low perennial; to 1 ft. Leaves oval to lance-shaped; mostly smooth; opposite, on a weakly squared stem. Purple flowers crowded on a terminal head; hooded, with a fringed lower lip; May-Sept. Where found: waste places, lawns. Throughout our area. Eurasian alien. Uses: traditionally leaf tea was used as a gargle for sore throats and mouth sores, also for fevers, diarrhea; externally for ulcers, wounds, bruises, sores. In China a tea made from the flowering plant is considered cooling, and was used to treat heat in the liver and aid in circulation; used for conjunctivitis, boils, and scrofula; diuretic for kidney ailments. Research suggests the plant possess antibiotic, hypotensive, antimutagenic and immune-system stimulating activity. Contains the antitumor and diuretic compound ursolic acid.

LEMON BALM, **MELISSA**; *Melissa officinalis* L.; Mint Family; leaves (used). Perennial; 1-2 ft. Leaves opposite; oval, round-toothed; **STRONGLY LEMON SCENTED**. Flowers whitish, inconspicuous, in whorls; May-Aug. Where found: barnyards, old house sites, open woods. Scattered over much of our area. Alien (Europe). Uses: dried or fresh leaf tea a folk remedy for fevers, painful

menstruation, headaches, colds, insomnia; mild sedative, carminative; leaves poulticed for sores, tumors, insect bites. Experimentally, hot-water extracts have been shown strongly antiviral for Newcastle disease, herpes, mumps; also antibacterial, antihistaminic, antispasmodic, and anti-oxidant. Sold in commercial anti-viral preparations in Germany.

WILD GINGER; *Asarum canadense* L.; Birthwort Family; root (used). Creeping perennial. Leaves strongly **HEART-SHAPED**. Flowers maroon, **URN-SHAPED**, with 3 "petals" (actually sepals); between crotch of leaves; April-May. Root strongly aromatic. Where found: rich woods. Canada to SC, AL; OK north to ND. Uses: American Indians highly valued root tea for indigestion, coughs, colds, heart conditions, "female ailments", throat ailments, nervous conditions and cramps. Relieves gas, promotes sweating, expectorant; used for fevers, colds, sore throats. Contains the antitumor compound aristolochic acid. Ginger substitute.

1990, 370 pp, \$16 in 1993 (ppd?), H Mifflin, Wayside Rd, Burlington MA 01803

Short Term Survival Techniques

"It is in the mind where we decide we wish to survive and once we determine that we will survive, our chance for survival increases dramatically."

"The number of downed planes not found by diligent search tell us that planes are hard to see from the air. People are even harder."

"In any area, streams usually lead to ... settlements." (Other writers suggest studying maps beforehand, to be aware of local peculiarities.)

"Springs of cold water are safest. Warm water in summer indicates that it has come from the surface and is more likely to be polluted."

"In hot deserts a person needs at least a gallon of water a day.... If you have the water then drink it if you need it Your body will begin to deteriorate when its water content gets below a critical level...."

Keep covered - including arms, legs, and neck - with loose, light colored clothes. "This not only prevents sunburn but keeps your sweat in, to retain body fluids Keep off the ground when resting. It is always cooler a few inches above ground level." Use a hammock or bed of twigs. "If you have blankets then make a shelter from the sun by setting up 2 layers separated..."

"If you have a minimum of water, avoid eating dry, starchy, salty, or highly flavored foods and meat. Good foods to eat under these conditions are hard candies, fruit, and vegetables. ... You can live a long time without food but only a short time without water. If you are near water ... it may be best to stay put for a while."

John's "philosophy on edible plants and survival is that you should not experiment with a large selection of plants but try to get the common plants known to be edible and easily obtained." To test for edibility, hold a "teaspoonful of the plant ... in your mouth for 5 minutes. If there is no unpleasant

effect such as burning then swallow it and wait at least 8 hours. If no ill effects show up by this time (try) ... a few mouthfuls for a few days and if there are no ill effects then you can eat more." "Any bird or egg is edible altho they may not taste like chickens."

"Rifles can kill at ranges over 200 yards, but chances of hitting a vital spot ... are slim. Most large animals are killed at ranges under 50 yards."

For survival if you're in water, always keep your clothing on. "Woolen underwear is almost as good" as wet suit.

In cold weather, "If you don't have a hat then make one from some other clothing since your greatest body heat loss is through your head and neck."

"Carbon monoxide poisoning is caused by a fire in an unventilated shelter." Headache and drowsiness may be the only symptoms. "Do not go to sleep in a tight shelter with fire or heater going: you will never wake up."

"When you use an axe do not try to cut a tree with one blow. ... rhythm and aim are more important than force. ... The weight of the axe will cut well if the axe is swung properly."

In wet hot tropics: "The biggest danger ... is from insects which may carry malaria. Wear long shirt sleeves and long pants even if it is hot. ... Never walk barefoot", much is infectious.

John Tomikel, 1984, 125pp, \$5+\$1 p&h in 1992, Allegheny Press, Elgin PA 16413.

Treading Lightly With Pack Animals.

Dan Aadland focuses on horses but other animals are mentioned.

An adult neutered male goat can carry 50-70 pounds; females (smaller) less. Goats eat a variety of vegetation, follow without a rope, and stay close in camp.

Dogs can carry $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ their weight. Dan favors breeds from working stock, 35 lbs minimum. For training, use a leash, and about one phone book in each pannier. (In any packing, weight both sides same. "Balance is crucial.") Then simply say "NO!" to (eg) rolling on or biting pack.

Llamas need relatively little food and water, no shoeing, and cause least erosion. Tho llamas weigh 375-500 lbs, many packers load them with no more than 80 lbs. They cost \$750+ (whereas a trained pack goat costs \$300). (I have heard that llamas are annoyingly slow.)

Donkeys can be kept in relatively little space. Some are good to ride.

Ponies (eg, Shetland, Welsh, Icelandic) are smart, tough, and inexpensive. A 500+ pounder "can carry average adult".

A full-size horse or mule can carry 150 lbs dead weight or 200 live. "Mules are tougher, probably smarter, and perhaps a bit trickier to handle...."

Natural materials (leather or cotton) chafe animals less than do synthetics.

Pack panniers with soft items towards the animal; heavy items on the bottom; and pots and pans muffled (eg, with cloth): "you don't want to spook the animal with strange noises that might not occur until the worst possible time."

Horses need "time to study the situation": surprise can cause turmoil. When you meet hikers, whose bulky packs may look strange, quickly say "hello", so their voices in reply will ease your

horse's fear. If you are a llama packer meeting horses, best move "about 50 yards off the downhill-side of the trail and let the horses pass."

For comfort, ride a smooth-gaited horse, NOT one that trots.

Horses do "best with numerous little meals" vs. a few big ones.

If left free, horses tend to roam. Tying them to trees can result in girdled trunks or pawed-up roots. Where grazing is permitted, Dan likes a portable electric fence (6 D-cells charge his one summer). But wild animals can down it. Best keep one mount tied short in camp, for rounding up any strays.

If you are dragged by the stirrup, "turning onto your stomach normally releases your foot." The best prevention is stirrup covers, which positively keep "more than the toe ... from protruding." To avoid being dragged by a hand, never wrap a lead rope around it: keep any folds of the rope encircled by hand.

Horses, ponies, donkeys, and llamas "are incredibly strong" compared to humans. "Respect for their strength is an absolute prerequisite for safety."

They are controlled by pressure on sensitive spots, eg, the poll "on top of the neck, just behind the ears..." The strap from a halter passing over the poll exerts pressure, which a "halter-broke" horse has learned to yield to.

Horses fear what they can't see, including what's directly in front (their blind spot), in back, and above (keep your arms low). The safest approach is from the side "toward the shoulder" because the horse feels less threatened, and you're not in line of "rear feet that could kick back, or front feet that could strike. When the horse lets you, touch it on the shoulder. ... Talk softly, with a firm tone."

"Always tie a horse with a halter and a stout lead rope. Reins are for riding, lead ropes for tying."

Synthetic rope halters with only adjustable knots have no hardware to break. Likewise a lead rope with backsplice and eyesplice (loop) instead of a swivel snap. Also lighter and quieter.

To find out who owns land that looks promising, go to the county courthouse. Land-ownership maps are public info.

I especially liked how Dan says what he has ACTUALLY DONE. His account of a trip with his wife and two sons mentions problems as well as pleasures. The some explanations/photos were not clear to me, and the book seemed padded, I loved it.

1993, 149 pp, \$17 ppd, Mountain Press, POB 2399, Missoula MT 59806; 800-2345308.

Roadside Geology of Oregon

This guide by David Alt and Donald Hyndman includes 37 maps of roads and rock types, 87 photos of rocks/terrain, and 70 diagrams. Includes geo history.

In Klamath Falls, hot water and steam can be gotten "from shallow wells nearly anywhere in town." Some power generated. Glass Buttes (near Bend) is a "whole mountain of obsidian" streaked beautifully.

1978, 280 pp, \$16 ppd in 1994. Mtn Press (address above). Others in series: AK, AZ, CO, ID, MT, NM, NY, n.CA, PA, TX, UT, VT/NH, VA, WA, WY. Free catalog.

Report on Shelter Systems' dome-tent.

Ours has been in continuous use for two years, set up in a shady spot. The cover is still good. The insect net ripped long ago. The wall seams tend to open up and have to be often fooled with: we have to readjust the clips before a rain.

On the whole, this tent has been worth the cost for us. The 3 boys use it as a separate bedroom, so that our main tent is less crowded at night. Gives the parents some privacy.

Anne, CA

Our tipi lasted only five years of summer-only use.

It was waterproofed (cotton canvas?). Now sticks poke right through it. Jai Loon, Washington, July

Durable fabric salvaged from no-longer-inflatable building.

It was a military-surplus blow-up hospital, which can be purchased cheaply if the bladders get leaky, but may be difficult to find. The rubberized nylon usually lasts 15 or 20 years. With a treadle sewing machine, I made a 15-foot tipi which I use for socializing during summers. Al Fry, ID

Strong fabric can be salvaged from discarded sails.

If you happen to be near a sailboat storage area, check the dumpbins now and then, especially at the beginning and end of the sailing season. Many boaters replace their sails every year or two, and the cloth may still be good enough for resewing into tents or tipis. (Many sails are polyester.) Discarded tarps and ropes are also found. Wildflower, CT,

Legality of salvaging from dumpsters.

Amy Dacyczyn, who phoned several police officials, said (in The Tightwad Gazette, July 1993), "dumpster diving is generally considered to be legal with the following exceptions: -- If the container is on CLEARLY MARKED private land, behind a fence or locked up. However, most dumpsters in 'semi-public' areas such as parking lots are fair game. -- If the discarded items are outside the dumpster they should not be taken. -- If you make a mess. Leave a dumpster site cleaner than you found it." A deputy district attorney in Santa Clara, CA, where many people rummage for high-tech discards, told Amy: "By putting items in a dumpster, the companies have abandoned ownership.... The idea that people are stealing is not a prosecutable case." (sent by Julie)

How to prevent unraveling of synthetic fabric.

I pass the edges through a candle flame, which melts the ends of the threads and sticks them together. When I do this I wear sunglasses. They prevent the temporary vision loss I otherwise get from looking into the flame, and might guard against long-term eye damage. Julie Summers, Oregon, January

How to render canvas tents and bags water-resistant.

One method: Measure 3 cups soybean oil and 1½ cups turpentine. Mix well, then paint on outer surface. Allow to dry fully before use. Only for articles used only outdoors.

Another method: Rub soft wax onto surface of cloth.

What waterproofing do you recommend? Wildflower, CT

(Reply:) In June '87 MP p.11, Dennis reported on "RainCheck", which worked fairly well on some materials, not others.

We often use NON-waterproof cloth as a top tarp, with a plastic under tarp. (Most waterproofers smelly (and toxic?)).

If waterproofing doubtful, pitching a tarp STEEP helps.

Golf cart converted to trail cart.

I found a second-hand golf-bag cart at a yard sale. By removing the bag and adding a surplus military pack-frame, I now have a rugged "all terrain" handcart for bulky items. Wflr

Choosing portable dwellings easy to find places for.

The smaller, lighter and more backpackable your dwelling is, the more places it will fit. On the other hand, the better equipped (and presumably larger) your dwelling is, the further you can live from settlements and the more territory you have in which to find places. What will be optimum?

For a remote over-winter camp, Holly and I may carry in 10 to 20 backloads, which includes much of the food we will eat. For a summer camp, which may be near a city or a good foraging area, we may carry in only two backloads initially (one trip by the two of us), but may add to it gradually.

Width of a structure is more crucial than length, at least around here where forests and brushlands are usually on slopes, often steep. A long, narrow structure (eg, 6x25') can be sited easier than a round or square structure (eg, 12x12') with the same floor area, because long, narrow terraces are easier to find or to prepare than are short, wide ones. A long, narrow structure will also be brighter, assuming most light comes from the downhill side, and warmer when sunny.

Height is also important, especially if much wind. A low structure need not be as strong and thus can be built lighter. It will also be warmer, at least at night or on a cloudy or windy day. It will also be less visible and therefore less likely to provoke complaints or hassles.

For year-around living in the maritime northwest, our favorite user-built shelter is presently the Hillodge (long description in April '92 DP). In flatish interior desert areas, we might like a Twipi (described in LLL packet), though we have not had much experience with Twipis nor deserts.

For summer-only use, a much simpler and lighter shelter will suffice. If little wind, just bug net and plastic tarp.

Unfortunately, quite a few novices see a big, spectacular tipi, yurt or dome at a gathering or trade show, fall in love with it, and buy it - WITHOUT having a good place to put it. They wind up in a friend's backyard or some farmer's pasture, which usually leads to problems. A big tipi (etc) can be nice at a gathering for a council or concert on a rainy day. But for living in, we much prefer smaller shelters.

If we need more room, we cluster several small shelters. For winter warmth, we live mostly in just one of them which we insulate, and use the others mainly for storage. For a project requiring much space, we erect a temporary tarp - or wait until summer.

Any backpackable structure is easier to site than is any vehicle, except perhaps in some dense cities and intensively-farmed areas which might allow temporary parking on streets but have no unused lands. We don't have experience with vehicles since a little car-camping while traveling, 15 to 20 years ago. But our impression is: the smaller and more ordinary-looking a vehicle is, the more easily it can be parked. Hank and Barb Schultz, MP/DP founders, wrote (in Sept '82 MP p.2) about living out of and sometimes in a pickup with canopy which they insulated (not a big camper).

(In the early 1980s, they also wrote several articles about choosing shelters, which are in the Light Living Packet (or, if you prefer bigger print, set #W). Any later info?)

Tips for making a comfortable bed without a mattress.

I dig a hip hole that is actually a TRENCH - the whole width of the bed, so that I can turn over freely. If I have only a little padding, I place most of it under my hips because that is where I bear heaviest. Julie Summers, Oregon

Bed and storage in van made from footlockers and plywood.

Living in a van can be a pain for lack of storage space. I purchased four military-surplus footlockers, covered all with a piece of 3/4" plywood, topped with a foam mattress. I now have a comfortable bed with storage space under it. And, I can easily remove all and temporarily store outside, if I need to haul bulky items in the van.

Another footlocker I made into a standing storage-locker with door by adding a few shelves. Wildflower, CT, July

Connecting remote living with city jobs.

My husband goes to the Bay area (a 2½ hour drive) for two days every other week, to do his gardening jobs there. He sleeps in his truck, parked at a friend's house.

One acquaintance lives in Oregon and spends every other week washing windows in San Francisco. Another lives in northern California and works two weeks per month as a lawyer in Los Angeles. Anne Callaway, California, June

Cellular phone useful though not reliable.

There is much static and service often cuts off in the middle of a call, even though we have an auxilliary antenna.

We tried recharging by plugging into a vehicle at night, but that was inadequate. Now we have a 12-volt deep-cycle battery that we get charged in town. (Someone goes often.)

The phone is EXPENSIVE to use, but worth it since both my husband and oldest boy use it to schedule yard work and odd jobs. Many people won't bother to hire someone they cannot reach by phone. Anne Callaway, California, June

Gasoline Coleman lanterns are cheaper to fuel but break easily.

The old Coleman-fuel type was more reliable.

By calling the 800#, we get replacement generators fast, but we would rather they not break. We cope by always having an extra gasoline lantern. Anne Callaway, California, June

Our James washer works great but is too fragile.

It has broken many times, requiring welding or replacement of parts. We may be partly to blame: our musclemann teen does the laundry and he overloads the machine. Anne, CA, June

Some rural landfills do not discourage scavenging.

They are like free hardware stores. Al Fry, Idaho, Febr.

Tips for avoiding trouble with rural settlers.

Someone in the southeast wrote that people there tend to be inquisitive, hostile to unconventional dwellingways, and likely to call the police. The same is true of some people in the northwest - and probably everywhere.

Most house-dwellers are too busy working to earn money to pay their rent or taxes (and to pay for the vehicle they need to commute to work - etc.), to give much mind to what goes on beyond their immediate neighborhood. However, SOME people ARE nosy and, like the dog who didn't want a bone but didn't want anyone else to have it either, would be hostile to us if they could, even though we are no threat to them nor do

they covet our lifestyle. We avoid trouble by avoiding them.

We try to look conventional when traveling. Often we bicycle. Bicycling is common here, else we wouldn't stay here.

We generally avoid any short, dead-end road that has houses along it. Some people in those houses may be acquainted with everyone who lives on that road, and will be curious about anyone else they see repeatedly.

When leaving any road to go into the woods, we do so where and when we are out of view of houses and motorists.

For long-period camping (more than a few nights), we choose areas that are not near any road and not easy to hike through. Generally our areas are steep, tangly or both. (Western Oregon has many such areas to choose from.) We avoid areas due for logging or thinning.

At our long-period campsites, we don't build open fires, keep noisy animals (or any animals), cut down trees, or do anything else that might attract attention. H & B, OR, April

Various comments on places and dwellingways.

Many people in the east seem to believe that the west is mostly empty. True, there are large areas with almost no people. But these are mostly deserts. There are such areas in EASTERN Oregon (far from where we are), in much of Nevada, and in parts of CA, AZ, NM, UT, WY, ID and other states. But to find large WOODED areas that are unpopulated, I believe you must go to Alaska or northern Canada.

WESTERN Oregon is not trackless wilderness. On the average it is as heavily populated as are most eastern states. Though it has many unsettled areas, these are relatively small (none much larger than 10x10 miles), are traversed by logging roads, and are surrounded by farms, villages and some big cities. However, we have portably dwelled here for 15 years without any serious problems. A few times we have been hassled on roads and in cities (probably less than are most people because we spend little time there). We have never been hassled in the woods.

Sometimes we hear from people who would like to live conventionally (in a house, or at least a large house trailer) but to do so cheap. Western Oregon does not seem good for that (at least not where we have been). (For more about western Oregon, including the weather, see April '92 DP p.5.)

We don't know of any place in the U.S. that is good for conventional dwelling. There are some semi-ghost-towns out on the plains where houses can be PURCHASED cheaply, sometimes for no more than back taxes. But TAXES there are as high as anywhere (we've heard) - which may be one reason the houses were abandoned. (Someone who wants a high-taxed dwelling, had better move somewhere they can make lots of money.)

We have heard of parts of Mexico where land can be rented or leased inexpensively for trailers (\$35/month, Lee reported in Jan '91 MP p.10). I don't believe a U.S. citizen can BUY land in Mexico unless married to a Mexican citizen.

Last winter was exceptionally cold and nasty in the east, someone wrote. The northwest was somewhat milder than usual, with no heavy snow. No prolonged cold where we were (in the hills), but the cities (in the valleys) were often colder. Some days, even in January, were sunny and warm enough by noon on our south slope to sun bathe (70°?), while the weather radio reported Eugene still foggy and 28°. Bert & Holly, OR, April

We welcome more reports, especially on shelters and equipment.

Payment: subscription/extension (or ?). What are you using? In what conditions? How is it performing? May 1994 p.12